1. Indian Literature in English Translation: A Historical Perspective

And, if they ask what mortal pours the strain?

Say for thou seest earth, air, and main,

Say, 'From the bosom of yon silver isle,

Where skies more softly smile,

He came; and lisping our celestial tongue,

Though not from Brahma sprung,

Draws orient knowledge, from its fountains pure,

Through caves obstructed long, and paths too long obscure.'

Hymn to Surya
Translated by William Jones

This chapter maps the origins and development of translations from Indian languages into English. It is not within the scope of this chapter to give a comprehensive account of all translations from Indian languages into English. Rather, it offers a selective overview of some translations that serve as milestones and have altered the structures of source and target cultures; in other words, shaped the "field" in a significant way. In mapping these translations and their contexts, the choice of texts is not based upon any fixed criterion of 'most representative' or most 'popular.' I have, by and large, selected texts that lend themselves to an investigation of the processes and contexts behind their emergence and highlight the complex nature of translation into English. The emphasis is upon a thematic rather than a strictly chronological survey of the 'field.' The chapter is structured as follows: the first section of the chapter traces translation by the British, since the
foundation of Indian literature in English was laid through the British. The purpose of starting with Nathaniel Halhed and ending with William Jones is to show the path that literary translations have traversed. Translation began as an administrative tool and by the time we come to Jones' *Shakuntala*, it had become a tool with which to 'discover' India. The second section takes up the study of translations into English by Indians. Many assumptions underlie the act of translating one's 'culture' into an alien language. What are the aims and compulsions/rewards of such an exercise? What forms of resistance/assimilation are indicated in such an exercise, and how in some ways did it form part of a larger cultural, nationalist awareness? It is important to travel in time and see what kinds of texts Indians of the nineteenth century were translating, whom they were addressing and why. This section ends with the emergence of *Gitanjali*, since it put the Indo-European literary relation on a different scale and footing. The third and final section of the chapter is concerned with translations in post-independence India. It dwells upon a specific point of the trajectory: the canonization of translation through A.K. Ramanujan.

The methods employed to highlight the agenda and purpose of translations are not textual; there is no attempt to compare a translation with its 'original.' I have attempted to read around the act of translation and looked at the 'outwork' -- the reasons for the inception of a certain text; the translator's background and her relationship vis-à-vis her audience. Special attention, therefore, has been paid to prefaces, introductions or notes that frame and cite the "main text" for "historical" readers. Anitha Devasia and Susie Tharu state that prefaces "stake out the border-lines between work and world, granting
the author momentary respite from the discipline of the text. In a brief appearance front stage before the curtain is raised, authors may appear uncostumed to play their everyday selves and engage readers in a direct and autobiographical mode of address." In addition to prefaces, readers' responses from both source and target cultures have been used as indices of the reception of specific texts. Finally, it is hoped that this historiography will highlight the legacies and processes by which ILET got to its present stage.

I

The English language came to India and, from the 18th century onwards, gave clear signs of wanting to stay on. One clear sign or signal was through acts of translation. Translations from Indian languages into English are products of the special context of late eighteenth and nineteenth century British India. The translations initiated in the period of British Orientalism in India provide an enduring account of the construction of knowledge and relationships integral to colonial rule. The period from 1772 to 1840 witnessed multiple systems of knowledge constructed by the British and translations were one outcome of that knowledge-creating enterprise. A series of translations of ancient Indian texts undertaken by the British after 1770, has served for generations (among Indians and Europeans) as an 'authentic' account of India. The Orient was 'translated' and made available for self-definition not only to the Europeans but also to the Orientals themselves. As such, travel writings, histories and other dictionaries may also be seen as acts of translation. -- acts of interpreting local systems of signification and translating them into one's own understanding of a dominant culture. However, for reasons of focus,
I will restrict the discussion here to the underlying assumptions and ideologies as the British sought to translate Indian texts of legal, religious and literary kinds into their own language. This inquiry begins with the role of the East India Company and the intellectual and administrative foundations governing its commitment to Oriental knowledge.

After the battle of Plassey (1757) the Company placed itself firmly on Indian soil and began to take its own role seriously. The far-flung expansion of the company called for a set of ideological and intellectual constructs that sustained and legitimized the Company's rule in India. Till then the East India Company's activities were only economic in nature and its servants were only 'alien freebooters longing to return home shouldering their bag of riches.' But the solidity of the Company in Bengal in the late eighteenth century demanded a different kind of functioning, the translation of conquest into "just governance." It must also be noted that the economic character of Europe itself was changing at this time and this too played a part in bringing about a change in the Company's policies in India. As Europe transformed itself into a capitalist economy, the need was for productive capital, i.e. a surplus that could be recycled into production. It was this that led the East India Company to change from simple trading to entrenching itself in the colonies and organising labour and land to produce a surplus. This surplus was used to finance the Company, and also went into increasing production back 'home' in England. All this existed simultaneously with ideals of liberalism and democracy at home which did not legitimize the right to control a vast Asian sub-continent. The control had to be made inevitable and its goal noble. Administrative concerns and a responsibility
for the well-being of the people, interdependent issues, both went into the Company's decision to take charge of civil justice in Bengal.

But before we come to that, it may be useful to look at the range of ideas that formed a backdrop for the East India Company at that juncture. At a broader level, Britain's own identity as a nation concerned with the progress and happiness of its subjects overseas began to be formed. The rapacious years of the Bengal famine and the cruelty exhibited by the Company's officials who were busy amassing wealth necessitated proper statesmanship emanating from an efficient and benevolent government. As ideals of liberalism and freedom floated across Europe, Britain had to re-assess its role in India and its interaction with the natives. In addition, under the influence of the ideals of the Enlightenment the British saw themselves as a 'modern' and 'civilized' people. This meant that colonial expansion could be legitimized by a complex set of civilizing missions. One of the offshoots of the Enlightenment was also a high premium upon empiricism. Unlike Englishmen of the sixteenth century, the new officers had been brought up to believe that it was necessary that racial theories be evolved only after scientific and objective scrutiny of races. In more concrete terms, the East could not be just perceived simply as an incomprehensible monstrosity. It had to be empirically observed, categorized and then hierarchised. This does not imply that English civil servants of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were free of racial biases. There was, however, a greater commitment to knowing the Orient. The knowledge resulting from this very often reinforced the view of India's fall from a rich antiquity to an anarchic present. But what is important here is the many-sided process in which the British were engaged as they set about knowing the Indian past. Translation was one of the
manifestations of that process. In the early days of the colonial encounter, as the English set about studying the 'Hindoo' psyche, the ancient texts seemed the most 'logical' way to begin. Reading those texts and making them available for subsequent officers involved translation, it was the first step for the British. It helped unveil the mystique around ancient Indian civilization because "idioms [got] desacralized by the very act of translation."  

Coming back to the changing role of the East India Company at that juncture, the shifts in the governing of the colony took place in tandem with broader, changes abroad. An evident turning point is 1772 when Warren Hastings was appointed as the new Governor-General of the Company. Hastings' predecessors, that is Company servants, up to the end of eighteenth century, had barely any training in classical learning and colonial administration. Hastings' appointment marked a change in the recruitment policies for young officers. Lawson notes that "In Hastings the Company had appointed someone to high office who showed pride in his knowledge and regard for oriental government, society and culture." Hastings considered it politically advisable and ethically desirable to know the country through its languages. Hastings had a cardinal belief that "wise and efficient government by Britain in India would be possible only on the basis of intimate knowledge of Indian life and civilization." Talking of natives, Hastings wrote to Nathaniel Smith: "Every instance which brings their real character home to observation will impress us with a more generous feeling for their natural rights, and teach us to estimate them by the measure of our own. But such instances can only be obtained in their writings: and these will survive when the British dominion in India shall have long
ceased to exist, and when the sources, which it once yielded of wealth and power, are lost to remembrance.\textsuperscript{12}

This set the tone for Indological studies, initiated by Hastings and later fostered and entrenched by William Jones. This interspersion of 'pure scholarship' and kind condescension — motives neither completely altruistic nor entirely mercenary — governs several enterprises of this time. It is only natural that the foundation of an institution like the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784) was laid in Hastings' time and with his encouragement. Hastings' arrival coincided with the Company's decision to exercise direct administrative control over Bengal and this heralded the transformation of what had been a private trading company into a colonial power. On 28 August 1771 the court of directors notified the president and council at Fort William of their "determination to stand forth as Diwan by the agency of the Company's servants and to take over the administration of civil justice in their possessions."\textsuperscript{13} The implementation and modalities of this decision were left to the Company's representatives in Bengal. This therefore was the first task before Hastings when he took charge in 1772. Hastings submitted the judicial plan that was to guide the British in meting out justice in specific matters to the Indians. The plan stated that "in all suits regarding inheritance, marriage, caste, and other religious usage, or institutions, the laws of the Koran with respect to the Mohametans and those of Shaster with respect to the Gentooos shall be invariably adhered to."\textsuperscript{14} Hastings believed that it was unfair to impose alien laws on the natives. Since the Company had taken over the administration of Bengal, it was politically prudent to contextualize policies and allow their evolution from a local context. The issue of legitimization and authority was very relevant to the British. The native codes of authority incorporated into
the colonial scheme of things lent an appearance of mutual consent. In Hastings' mind the natives had to be ruled by their own principles and institutions. Also, perceptions of the Orient by people back home amounted to believing that the East was unruly and anarchic and had no laws of its own. By referring to Hindu and Muslim laws Hastings wanted to correct that perception and proceed with an Orientalist way of administration. A code, a text, an English text was needed to prove to misguided critics at home that Hindus were not only entitled to their laws, but that they indeed had written laws, which had reached an acceptable level of sophistication, and were in any event better adapted to their needs.\textsuperscript{15} Historians, anthropologists and literary critics have discussed the problematic issues inherent in the plan. I wish to bring to mind some of the obvious loopholes in Hastings' idea of consolidating the legal codes of the Hindus selected from \textit{shastric} literature by the pundits, and then dwell upon the politics of translating Hindu laws.

Hastings' project was ambiguous in conception and difficult in implementation. The difficulty lay particularly where codes for the Hindus were concerned. Following current practice in Bengal, which was a Muslim-ruled state, the British accepted Muslim criminal law as the law of the land, but civil law was to be Hindu for Hindus and Muslim for Muslims.\textsuperscript{16} The first fallacious assumption lay in thinking that there existed fixed sets of legal codes that could be applied literally to Indian subjects. It was a common belief with the British that patterns of all behaviour and customs could be traced back to some 'pure origins' that would render explanations. Secondly, the unity and coherence imposed on Hindu identity was, to a certain degree, a construction. The assumption of inviolable
commonness in Hinduism was as much an offshoot of Brahminism as of British scholarship. The British invested the Brahmins with the authority of interpreting the sacred laws because the Brahmins were at the apex of the social order and knew Sanskrit. What was ignored was the relevance of shastric literature to the day to day life of common Indians. Compilation apart, there were practical difficulties in translating the Codes into English. Hindu legal codes available in texts like the Manusmriti were in Sanskrit. Few Indians and fewer British knew Sanskrit at that time. The Brahmins communicated in Sanskrit. So it was decided that a text would be first prepared in Persian and eventually translated into English. (From the sixteenth century onwards, the British had focussed upon learning Persian since Persian was the language of administration. It was a pragmatic vehicle of communication between representatives of the Company and the Mughals and Nawabs in India.) This juncture marked an important shift made by the British from Persian to Sanskrit. The task of preparing a Code was entrusted to Nathaniel Brassey Halhed, the first Englishman to translate from an Indian language.

Halhed belonged to the English elite. After a false start as a dramatist and then a "certain emotional disappointment" Halhed took the India assignment "on the rebound."17 In his days at Christ Church he had come into contact with William Jones and that acquaintance also played an important role in his decision to come to India. Halhed had learnt Persian and Arabic before he learned Sanskrit. Sisir Kumar Das notes how there was a "feeling at that time that a knowledge of Arabic and Persian could unlock the secrets of the Orient."18 Meanwhile in India Warren Hastings was trying to deal with the vexed
problem of the native legal system. Halhed's arrival in India coincided Hastings' Judiciary Plan of 1772, a happy coincidence for Halhed who had otherwise failed to make a very successful life back home. Hastings asked Halhed to prepare an English commentary on the legal codes, and an elaborate method of English translation from an Indian language began. This first work of English translation was a collaboration of eleven Hindu Pundits who knew Sanskrit, a Muslim speaking the Bengali dialect who also knew Persian and Halhed, the English translator. The eleven pundits organised the laws in Sanskrit. This served as the primary source text for Halhed. The Sanskrit original is called *Vivadarnavsetu* (across the sea of litigation). The Sanskrit text was orally communicated to a Muslim who prepared a Persian commentary of the text. Halhed then translated his English version from the Persian commentary. The result was *A Code of Gentoo Laws or Ordinations of the Pundits* (1776). Halhed inaugurates the practice of Indian texts in English translation by laying down, in no unspecific terms, the administrative usefulness of the Code:

"The importance of the commerce of India, and the advantages of a territorial establishment in Bengal, have at length awakened the attention of the British Legislature to every circumstance that may conciliate the affections of the natives, or ensure stability to the acquisition. Nothing can so favourably conduce to these two points as a well-timed toleration in matters of religion, and an adoption of such original institutes of the country as do not immediately clash with the laws or interests of the conquerors."

The book was initially meant to be a private edition published by the East India Company. In another two years, not only had pirated and renewed editions of the Code appeared, but it had also been translated into French and German. There are various
issues to the Code. Questions can be raised about whether the Code, thrice removed from Sanskrit, can be considered a translation proper. William Jones raised doubts about the accuracy of the translation. In a letter dated 19th March 1788, addressed to Cornwallis, Jones states:

"But, whatever be the merit of the original, the translation of it has no authority, and is of no other use than to suggest inquiries on the many dark passages, which we find in it: properly speaking, indeed, we cannot call it a translation; for though Mr. Halhed performed his part with fidelity, yet the Persian interpreter had supplied him only with a loose injudicious epitome of the original Sanscrit, in which abstract many essential passages are omitted. All this I say with confidence, having already perused no small part of the original with a learned Pandit, comparing it, as I proceeded, with the English version."

Jones mistrusted the Persian interpreter; some others had suspicions about the willingness and commitment of the Brahmins to impart information to Halhed. However, there were fewer means of assessing the 'accuracy' of the text because the tradition of Sanskrit studies had yet to be established. Despite all the awkwardness of its modus operandi, the final product met with immediate diffusion and sales in Europe. However, the reception of the book was far from uniform. Ironically the book did not prove to be very useful to practising lawyers. But to theoretical jurists and historians of civilization the Code became the fundamental source on Hindu laws and customs. Practitioners in courts found the Code full of inconsistencies. Mild misdemeanours appeared to call for severe punishment whereas serious crimes led to mild reprimand. This sense of the contradiction added to the general European bewilderment regarding India. The laws served as an index for assessing the level of civilization India had reached. To some it brought home
the antiquity and sophistication of thought in Hindu civilization. To detractors like James Mill who quotes copiously from the Code, the laws only reinforced their opinion of the savage nature of the Hindus. Mill quotes the following passage from the Code to testify despotic and merciless government: "If a man makes complaint before the magistrate against the magistrate's counsellor, without any real fault in him, or performs any business or service for the magistrate's accuser, the magistrate shall put him to death." To this James Mill says," Under the operation of this law, the magistrate had little to fear from accusation. There could be no remedy for any grievance; because the existence of any grievance could hardly ever be told."22

The mixed reception of the Code is an indication of the seriousness with which the first work translated into English was taken. Save a few, almost everybody in Europe saw this translation as a reflection of Indian society and its legal system. The multiple stages in the translation exercise and Halhed's ignorance of Sanskrit notwithstanding, the Code was to most, a 'true' and comprehensive account of the Indian legal system. At the same time, there is hardly any record of Indian responses to the Code. The English translation was very obviously meant for English readers. The Hindu pundits who anthologized the collection of codes were not even aware that there would be an English translation of their work. To Bengali Indians Halhed's name was associated more with the Grammar of the Bengali Language than with the Code. "All in all the Code of Gentoo Laws had more influence as an antiquarian and Indological document than as a book of law, and its impact was greater on Europe than on India."23 The Code had lasting impact in other ways: it opened up the field of Sanskrit studies for the British, which ultimately led to

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many translations of Indological texts. According to Cohn, eighteenth century texts
including translations, travel writings, surveys etc "began the establishment of discursive
formation, defined an epistemological space, created a discourse, and had the effect of
converting Indian forms of knowledge into European objects." 24 If such is the case, the
Code stands as one of the texts that initiated the formation of this discourse. Texts, in this
sense, were cultural artefacts that defined the East and the West in distinct terms. The
emphasis in this thesis is on what these texts stood for rather than what they actually were

Halhed's Code was born of a necessity to 'know' and therefore control Indian systems. It
also drove home the pragmatic need to learn Sanskrit. From Halhed onwards a curious
blend of pragmatism, fascination and a recognition of its cultural value made some
English administrators learn Sanskrit. The British 'discovery' of Sanskrit in the eighteenth
century was inextricably entwined with translation activity. Earlier on most English
officers had learned Persian before they came to India since Persian was a court
language. The last few decades of the eighteenth century reveal a shift from Persian to Sanskrit

The discovery of Sanskrit proved to be one of the greatest intellectual stimulations that
for the Western mind at this time. This ferment gave rise to affiliated fields like
comparative philology and comparative mythology, and created a special area of
scholarship – Indology. The patronage Sanskrit received at this time, (from about 1772 to
1900) went a long way to solidifying its status as the Ur-sprache, the parent of all
languages. The benefits promised by Sanskrit were twofold. It was a practical tool facilitating better governance, and it helped penetrate into the dark, mysterious passages of the ancient learning of the Hindus.

Halhed himself did not master Sanskrit, but he certainly inspired Charles Wilkins in whom all scattered and stray attempts at learning Sanskrit became organized. Wilkins was the first European translator to translate directly from Sanskrit and to prepare a Grammar of Sanskrit Language. In the preface to his Grammar, he asserts that all other "common dialects" (languages other than Sanskrit) if "deprived of Sanskrit, would not only lose all their beauty and energy, but, with respect to the power of expressing abstract ideas, or terms of science, would be absolutely reduced to a state of barbarism." 25

Studying Wilkins' Grammar became a regular feature for all civil servants coming to India, but in terms of creating a fine, philosophical other-worldly view of the Orient, Wilkins' translation of the Geeta is a landmark. This brings us to another important stage in the history of translations by the British. Wilkins' translation of the Geeta called The Bhagvet-Geeta (1784) marked, in William Jones' opinion, an "event that made it possible for the first time to have a reliable impression of Indian literature." 26 Unlike Halhed's Code, Wilkins' translation was directly from Sanskrit. For this reason, it appeared to William Jones to be unmarred by impure mediations. But before we come to the reception of this translation, let us look at its genesis. Unlike Halhed's Code, the Geeta had very little practical value. It was perhaps a relatively unplanned by-product of Wilkins' serious engagement with Persian. However, when Warren Hastings read an excerpt of the translated Geeta, it seemed to him an ideal means of propaganda to make a
case for an Indianized administration. He wrote to Nathaniel Smith, the chairman of the East India Company requesting publication of the translation by the East India Company. "Every accumulation of the knowledge and especially such as is obtained by social communication with people over whom we exercise a dominion founded on the right of conquest, is useful to the State. .it attracts and conciliates distant affections, it lessens the weight of the chain by which the natives are held in subjection, and it imprints on the hearts of our own countrymen the sense and obligation of benevolence."27

To support his cause, Warren Hastings linked an acquisition of any knowledge about the Orient with the acquisition of power for the State. The connection, beyond a point, did become tenuous. Two concerns may have governed Hastings' support for the publication of the Geeta. The first was his belief in ruling the conquered with their own systems, hence a need to know all kinds of administrative and cultural features of the colony. Second, it could have been one more effort by Hastings to justify Oriental projects by linking them up with power. In the Preface to his translation of the Geeta, Wilkins spoke of Hastings' encouragement of the Company's servants 'to render themselves more capable of performing their duty ... by the study of the languages, the laws and customs of the natives.'28 It is difficult to say whether the English translation of the Geeta rendered the civil servants more capable in discharging their duties. In any case, the appearance of the Geeta in English marked an important stage in the development of Western awareness of India. The translation did not bring about any tangible change, but it reaffirmed a picture of a pristine and spiritual Indian past, a time when rituals and superstitious practices had not contaminated the social fabric. The
Orientalists had acquired a view from various materials that Hinduism in its sublime moments had been deistic and unitary. The Hindus in their state of glory, which was of course in the past, had not engaged in polytheistic practices. The Geeta gave a picture of a time when Hinduism was philosophical and not ritualistic. Polytheism was a feature attributed by the British to India's degenerate present. Wilkins himself says in his preface that the "most learned Brahmans of the present times are Unitarians ... but, at the same time that they believe but in one God, an universal spirit, they so far comply with the prejudices of the vulgar, as outwardly to perform all the ceremonies ... these ceremonies, are as much the bread of the Brahmans, as the superstition of the vulgar is the support of the priesthood in other countries." Wilkins' translation suited the Western taste for a philosophical and speculative, as opposed to ritualistic, Hinduism. Images of a hallowed past when the 'gymnosophsists' of the East discussed mankind's existence, were disseminated. If Halhed's Code was Europe's 'key' to India's legal system, Wilkins' Geeta was a key to religion in India.

It was mentioned earlier that the Code made hardly any impact on Indian audiences. On the other hand, Wilkins' Geeta was influential. The central importance accorded to the Geeta by its selection for an English translation over many other spiritual texts had far-reaching impact upon Indian audiences. It is not being implied that before Wilkins translated the Geeta it was an unimportant text, rather, the emphasis is upon the role translation has played in the 'canonization' of the Geeta in the Indian consciousness. It seemed to many Indians that Wilkins' Geeta marked an important shift "from a series of travelers' tales" to a time when "the west began value India and her culture."
identification and privileging of the Geeta as a primary text by the rulers, had profound impact upon the ruled. It is not a coincidence that the Geeta became the key text for self-definition as leaders from Gandhi to Tilak attempted to articulate an Indian identity.

The Orientalist activity of the eighteenth century was largely centred on translations. The most concerted effort regarding the formation of Oriental knowledge came from William Jones. The impetus given to this activity by William Jones has had profound effects on literary and cultural histories of India. Jones' entire corpus of work – the establishment of the Asiatic Society, his lectures, translations and discourses, his inquiries into Indian history and civilization -- has been a matter of great debate, but there can be little doubt that Jones' arrival helped strengthen oriental studies and provided an academic counterpart to Hastings’ administrative concerns. From within that debate the focus here is only on Jones' overall contribution, and thereafter specifically upon his translations of some ancient Indian texts. Jones' translations along with his discourses and researches, were part of a larger and more ambitious goal -- "to know India better than any other European ever knew it." The grounding in Oriental knowledge that he had acquired much before coming to India equipped him to a certain degree. He came to India as a judge in the Supreme Court of Judicature of 1783. In the process of discharging his duty as a judge, Jones was required to consult authoritative texts on law. His dissatisfaction with Halhed's Code has already been mentioned because he felt strongly that direct translations from Sanskrit were preferable. According to him access to Hindu law should be gained without the accretions of contemporary times. In the initial period, Jones was reluctant to learn Sanskrit. He complained to Wilkins about the necessity of attending to
tasks other than Sanskrit. At the same time frustration mounted in him at having to depend on pundits and moulvis to interpret Sanskrit texts. He was uncomfortable about negotiating with 'original' and 'pure' texts through the sullied mediation of Persian. The 'infidelity' of native interpreters made it worse. All this finally resulted in Jones' decision to learn Sanskrit. He began to learn Sanskrit in order to break free of a dependence upon pundits. He had read various references to the Manusmruti in the process of pursuing his vocation and realized that it was one of the oldest extant works on law in India. After reading it in the original, Jones felt confident to undertake its translation himself. Jones' decision to translate an antiquarian text rather than something more representative of current practice stemmed from a conviction that all usage and manners have an explanation in a 'text' and any accretions of time such as defective, easily available translations corrupt the 'purity' of that text. Translations were important for Jones also because "the apparent monopoly of a form of indigenous knowledge by certain classes could only be broken through translation." The outcome of this is the Institutes of Hindu Law; or, The Ordinances of Menu, Jones' translation of the Manusmruti into English. This translation was highly influential in shaping cultural perceptions and legal systems for Indians. It also paved the path for Jones' Digest, a more comprehensive project completed by H.T.Colebrooke.

Jones' translation of the Manusmruti went through several editions. The fact that the Manusmruti was the first ancient "lawbook" to be translated (Jones 1974) and the fact that "it was translated by the most eminent scholar of Hindu law of his time endowed the Manusmruti with a reputation that was to withstand the discovery of other texts, ancient and modern, that were much more useful from a legal standpoint." The editor of the
third edition explains elaborately how the translator handled a recalcitrant text with adeptness. The 'peculiarity' of the content of the book, according to him, would 'explain the difficulty' the 'learned' translator had. Jones himself begins his preface by recording Britain's "compliance" with the maxim that the natives are best ruled with their own laws. The natives, he informs the readers "universally and sincerely believed that all their ancient usages and established rules had the sanction of an actual revelation from heaven...." Then Jones goes on to caution his reader about the "system of despotism and priestcraft" contained in the doctrines of the source text and concludes by saying:

"Whatever opinion in short may be formed of Menu and his laws, in a country happily enlightened by sound philosophy and the only true revelation, it must be remembered, that those laws are actually revered, as the word of the Most High, by nations of great importance to the political and commercial interests of Europe, and particularly by many millions of Hindu subjects, whose well directed industry would add largely to the wealth of Britain, and who ask no more in return than protection for their persons and places of abode, justice in their temporal concerns, indulgence to the prejudices of their old religion, and the benefit of those laws, which they have been taught to believe sacred, and which alone they can possibly comprehend." 

Jones hoped that translations would serve "to domesticate the Orient and thereby turn it into a province of European learning." The interlocking of translation as a discursive practice with the imperial project of colonisation in this case was quite complete. The choice of text, the ideological underpinnings of the translator's stance, the "transparency of representation" assumed in the entire exercise -- work towards the construction of a colonial subject who lives a-temporally and follows a despotic, peculiar and
incomprehensible system. Jones had a penchant for things antique and remote in the past. He declared that in all his inquiries concerning the history of India, "I shall confine my researches downwards to the Mohammedan conquests at the beginning of the eleventh century, but extend them upwards, as high as possible, to the earliest records of the human species."37 The complete refusal to take cognisance of India's present is evident in Jones' decision to refer to an ancient text for judicial matters of the present. However, the translator's choice is made out to be the natives' wish for usages and practices of a distant past. The 'visible' translator speaks for an 'invisible' native whose well-directed industry will add to the commercial wealth of Britain while the translator's own efforts contribute to cultural gains!

The Code and the translation of the Manusmruti were harnessed to colonial administration in an obvious way. They were undertaken at government behest and belie the view that the "world of scholarship and the world of administration during this period were worlds apart and not necessarily complementary to each other."38 However not all translations in this period showed clear political underpinnings. Some acquired a political slant in their use. For instance, there was nothing immediately 'relevant' about the Geeta. A touch of ad hocism was unmistakable in Hastings' approach. Similarly, William Jones' translation of Kalidasa's Abhignanshakuntalam had no specific political needs in mind. Jones undertook this translation when, as the leading member of the Asiatic Society, he was looking for any 'historical' document that would throw light upon ancient Indian history. The indistinct nature of genres in India, history sliding into myth or turning into fable, was a bewildering phenomenon for the British. Even before he came to India,
Jones had heard of a genre called natac which were said to contain a 'large portion of ancient history, without any mixture of fable.' Later on some Europeans told him that natacs were discourses on arts and music. Finally, the learned Brahmin Radhakant informed Jones that natacs were plays, and according to him, the most well known play was Abhignanshakuntalam. Jones translated it into English and it evoked a wider response than any other 'document' of that period. Jones' translation of Abhignanshakuntalam called Sakontala or The Fatal Ring in English became both popular and authoritative. It appeared in 1789 and a startled Europe opened its eyes to the East. When the play reached England, it was welcomed and reviewed widely. The responses to the play, whether Goethe in a flamboyant mode or James Mill in a negative mode, acknowledge the impact it had on its readers. Mill cites from Jones' translation of the Manusmruti the detailed evolution of elements and their properties only to reject them as "absurd ideas" and "random guesses." He concludes that Jones' translation of the Manusmruti is "unequivocal" and "cloaks" unimpressive ideas cleverly. On the other hand, he finds Shakuntalam unoriginal but takes the transparency of translation for granted thereby investing Jones' effort with authority. The Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine wrote in its review of the play:

"Will our readers turn from these fierce, wild and turbulent passions, breathed out from the constantly agitated bosom of European life, as exhibited in the English and German drama...One flight of the imagination and we find ourselves almost on another earth. It is delightful to sink away into those old green and noiseless sanctuaries, to look on the Brahmans as they pass their whole lives in silent and reverential adoration, --- virgins playing with the antelopes and bright-plumaged birds among those gorgeous woods --- and, as the scene shifts, to find ourselves amid
the old magnificence of oriental cities, or wafted on the chariot of some deity up to the palaces of the sky.\textsuperscript{40}

What need to be emphasized here are the images of an idyllic, pastoral Indian life released by Jones' Shakuntala. This confirms Tejaswini Niranjana's point that "as translator and scholar, Jones was responsible for the most influential introduction of a textualised India to Europe."\textsuperscript{41} The enthusiastic response to the play felt in Europe especially England and Germany was, quite often, severed from the social context of the play. Herder writing a preface to the second edition of Georg Forster's translation, suggested that the play was not European in spirit in that, being the production of a culture which believed the divine penetrated the core of human existence, it demanded to be read in tranquility and deep meditation.\textsuperscript{42} At the same time, Jones' translation made another, quite unique contribution. Translations previous to Shakuntala had exposed the West to the spiritual, philosophical and legal aspects of Indian civilization. Through the translation of Shakuntalam Jones introduced the literary side of India to the West. According to G.N.Devy, "Jones was the first British scholar to perceive India in terms of a literary culture and his discovery of India as a nation with a literature, and a literature extending to remote antiquity, enthused his readers in Britain to look to India for literary inspiration."\textsuperscript{43} The privileging of Shakuntala in the Western world enabled its creation into a national commodity as far as Indians were concerned. Shakuntala as a text became a marker of India's cultural prestige and one of the 'primary' texts in Indian consciousness. It was translated into more than ten Indian languages in the nineteenth century. In the following century, Shakuntala was translated into Marathi (1861), Hindi
The British phase of translation into English culminated in Jones' translation of *Shakuntalam*. We must bear in mind that hardly anything, at this time, was translated from other Indian languages. This was one of the manifestations of the Orientalist disregard for India's present. There is a large preponderance of works translated from Sanskrit because Sanskrit was the *Ur-sprache* and the only residue of a hallowed past. This point of view led to serious imbalances of representation. Again, within that limited corpus, works of a legal and spiritual nature dominated. A long tradition of highly metaphysical works translated from Sanskrit, says Brough, "gave an impression in the West that life in ancient India was universally passed in a haze of theosophical speculation and other-worldly religious preoccupations." Imbalances of this nature made the representation of India tilt in a certain direction and we will see in the next section how even Indian translators, were unable to correct this picture for a long time.

II

The texts discussed in the previous section point to the crucial role translations played in the eighteenth century. The nineteenth century witnessed some decline in Orientalist activity and therefore, in translations. Jones' explorations of Indian culture had a palpable effect upon the Germans. His translations wielded power through alluring imagery and had a tremendous influence upon German scholars like Max Mueller and Monier-Williams. Translation of ancient texts like the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* did continue in the
following century, but the contribution of English scholars to this field began to flounder. Devy offers the following explanation:

"About half a century after Sir William Jones began his exploration of the Indian literary past, the British opinion of India's literary wealth had gone through a radical reversal. In Britain, the Romantic revolution had come to a dead-end, the Utilitarians had taken over the task of forming public opinion, the signs of social unrest had started gaining momentum, gathering themselves towards the 'sinister' Chartist Movement, and the British Government had become politically more alert to the affairs of the expanding empire."

Britain's disenchantment with Jones was symptomatic of its changing perception of India in the nineteenth century —— for a host of reasons. The Utilitarians replaced community of officials like Hastings, Wilkins, Jones and H.T.Colebrooke, in the nineteenth century. James Mill and Lord Macaulay had little faith in the imagery circulated by the Orientalists. Mill's History of British India formed essential reading for officials visiting India, in this century. Although Mill cites Jones' translations extensively, it is only to reinforce his views on the dissipation of the Hindus. Jyotsna Singh concludes:

"The eighteenth century Orientalist vision gradually gave way to a new "discovery" by James Mill in his History of British India (1816), in which he defines the ancient Hindu period as the ruin of a decadent civilization, rather than as a pristine Aryan society."

What Mill was doing to Hindu civilization, Macaulay was doing to Oriental languages. In Macaulay's opinion, Sanskrit and Persian lacked aesthetic beauty as well as scientific thought. The new god of the nineteenth century, the English language, came to serve the civilizing mission. The beginnings of English studies in the nineteenth century reversed
the equation of the eighteenth century. Earlier, India was the 'donor' of ancient knowledge; later England became the 'donor' of liberalism and science through the English language. Gauri Viswanathan explains in great detail how Orientalism lost ground to Anglicism.

"The Orientalist position was that a Western political tradition could be successfully grafted upon Indian society without having to direct itself toward the transformation of that society along Western lines. But as a theory it found itself at odds with the direction of internal consolidation along which the British world was moving. The strengthening of England's position in India...put the rulers under less compulsion to direct change inward than to carry over the reformist impulse to those over whom they had dominion."47

The English world, taking shape in the light of industry and technology, had little patience with India's superstitious practices and 'irrational' obsessions. The heyday of English Romanticism, which was indirectly shaped by and sympathetic to Oriental traditions, had come to an end. There were hardly any advocates for transcendentalism. In addition, the missionary activity in the nineteenth century set up Hinduism in opposition to Christianity and contributed to the formation of negative opinions. Constant comparisons between a monotheistic Christianity and a polytheistic Hinduism established the superiority of the former. All this formed the kernel of British attitudes towards India, in the nineteenth century.

Turning to the Indian intelligentsia and its cultural and psychic contexts, we find that the Indians of nineteenth century Bengal articulate various attitudes towards the West. The contemporary elite in Bengal had been exposed to the English language long before
Macaulay formalised English studies in India. A select few educated people in Bengal initiate different kinds of relationships with the English language. Through literary exercises (including essays, plays and translations), socio-political tracts and debates, the Bengali elite carried out its first experiments with the coloniser's language. The advent of printing after 1800 further encouraged Indians looking for self-expression. Although 'vernacular writings' in this period abound and are vigorous, Indians writing in English were very often entering into public debate with the British. This marks an important stage in the Indo-British relationship. Indian responses (through English as well as Indian languages) to the intellectual and cultural pronouncements of the Empire signal a change in the Indo-British equation.

One of the most contested issues between the Indians and the British was India's historic past. Given the colonial expropriation of India's past, retrieval of history became an important aspect of the anti-colonial agenda. It was mentioned earlier that severe attacks on Hinduism were common at this time. The new intelligentsia very often contested such attacks by putting forth its own versions of the Indian past. (In most historical accounts, these versions are loosely clubbed together under the common rubric of 'reformism.') The reformists in different and specific ways re-examined and re-formed Hindu practices in the light of Western learning and Christianity. A sense of pride in the pristine past (infused to a large degree by the Orientalists) and defensiveness in the light of negative criticism led to re-interpretations of Hinduism. This provides us with the context of the first English translation by an Indian -- the translation of Sankara's *Vedanta* into English by the leading reformist, Rammohun Roy.
It is not a coincidence that the significant movement indicated by the reforming and theistic samajas of modern times was inaugurated by the first Hindu to prepare an English translation of the Upanishads. It is also not a coincidence that Roy was the first Indian intellectual to see the economic and 'cultural' benefits of the English language. His translations were born of his theological predilections and their significance has to be viewed in that context. I believe that their significance in the body of translated literature is historical rather than as influential translations per se. With that in mind, let us look at the intentions governing Roy's decision to translate Indian texts into English and their impact upon his target readers, that is, the Europeans. Rammohun Roy translated first Sankara's Vedanta into English, 'An Abridgement of the Vedant' (1816) and then the Kena and Isa Upanishads (1816) in order to correct "populist misconceptions about India." By focussing on one particular strand of Hinduism, Rammohun wanted to establish the fundamental unity of Hinduism and show polytheism to be an encrustation over time. He declares his reasons for translating in the preface:

"In pursuance of my vindication, I have to the best of my abilities translated this hitherto unknown work, as well as abridgment thereof, into the Hindoostanee and Bengalee language, and distributed them, free of cost, among my own countrymen, as widely as circumstances have possibly allowed. The present is an endeavor to render an abridgment of the same into English, by which I expect to prove to my European friends, that the superstitious practices which deform the Hindoo religion have nothing to do with the pure spirit of its dictates."

This attempt to demonstrate that Hinduism has one supreme God was fraught with theological and political implications. Roy's anxiety to purge the ancient sacred tradition
of modern-day corruptions glosses over the existence and validity of the multiple identities emerging from Hinduism. This oversimplification is borne out by the complete title of his translation of Vedanta: "Establishing the unity of the Supreme Being; and that He alone is the Object of Propitiation and worship." Roy was clearly interpreting Hinduism in the light of Christianity. On the other hand, Roy's determination to "interpret" Hinduism for the Indians and for the British clearly indicates his choice to translate and historicise the Indian past himself rather than accept "standard" versions circulated by the British. The Vedas and Upanishads, according to Nandy, were a "sufficiently vague and complex authority to stand new interpretations... In stressing an interpretive system, which gave greater scope to dissent, Rammohun Roy therefore also gave centrality to texts, which were best suited for plural interpretations." This matter is debatable and it is not within the scope of this study to discuss it in detail. I do wish to point out how the act of translation was invested with the authority of someone who knew both the East and the West and could speak on behalf of both cultures. The validity of the exercise and the accuracy of the translation are peripheral issues compared to the fact that for the first time an Indian intellectual was addressing a Western audience in the latter's language. A reviewer in the Times (2 Oct 1832) remarked:

"It will be recorded as one of the remarkable incidents of the nineteenth century, that a Brahman of respectable rank and strong powers, thoroughly conversant with his own vernacular and classical literature, and almost equally familiar with the learning of the west, should have been the first to transfer into our own language an appreciable portion (for passages had been previously translated) of these awful works, for the express purpose of vindicating his forefathers from the charge of idolatry, by establishing the unity of the Supreme Being..."
Roy was inserted in the traditions and languages of the East and the West. This position gave his translations a standing and seriousness that was made possible for the first time. Another review of the translations said: "Of the fidelity of the translations we do not profess to be competent to judge; but, as the work of an individual perfectly skilled in both languages, they cannot, we imagine, be otherwise than faithful. The Rajah's English style is astonishingly perspicuous, correct, and idiomatical."\(^{54}\) The reception of Roy's translations by his English readers was interesting. It is difficult to say whether it actually influenced the opinions of the British regarding monotheism in Hinduism. The impact of the English translation and Roy's pronouncements on *Vedanta* "signaled a change in the relations between Indologists and Indian scholars."\(^{55}\) Roy represented a new generation of Indian scholars who could intervene in British descriptions of their land. Eminent British Indologists like H.H. Wilson and H.T. Colebrooke quoted him on the subject of *advaita Vedanta*, the only living Indian vedantin whose authority they acknowledged. Robertson remarks that Wilson presented Rammohun as a reformer whose translations had sparked off a movement which was breathing new life into a decaying system.\(^{56}\)

Translations into English by Indians starting with Roy were a natural fall-out of the Indological translations of the eighteenth century. There were hardly any translations by Indians in the first half of the nineteenth century, very few followed the example of Roy. However, in the late nineteenth century there was a substantial rise in the number. Translations from Sanskrit which had begun in the eighteenth century gained further momentum in the nineteenth. These translations ranged from well-known treatises to poetry and drama. This period produced "dedicated specialists as well as inspired
visionaries; and the translation carried out was either philologically accurate to the last detail as in numerous texts on poetics, or was cheerfully liberal as in the renderings by occultists, godmen and social radicals. Erudite exercises in translation were aimed at Western Indologists who knew Sanskrit and Indian scholars who knew English. One strand of this phenomenon was translations of works from Urdu undertaken at Fort William College under the supervision of the principal, the Scotsman John Gilchrist. These were meant to be study materials for the officers of the East India Company. One very popular product of this effort was Mir Amman's *Bagh O Bahar*, translated by Duncan Forbes in 1862.

Towards the end of the century a few contemporary works from Bengali were translated into English. Iswarchandra Vidyasagar's essay on *Marriage of Hindu Widows* in 1856 and *Sermista: A drama in five Acts* were translated by the author Michael Madhusudan Dutt into English in 1859. By and large, Indian translators, for a long time, were unable to shed the mantle of the white Indologists and continued to translate only from Sanskrit with a clear focus upon the ancient Hindu past. Commenting on this, Hume remarks: 'Especially now, in the generally admitted inadequacy of the degraded form of popular Hinduism, the educated Hindus are turning to their old scriptures and are finding there much which they confidently stake against the claims of superiority of any religion or philosophy.' In the face of constant criticism and threat from Western quarters (education and religion), some Indians were invoking the past to confer dignity upon a 'degraded' present. A recovery of the past was indispensable to what has been called the 'nationalistic consciousness' of the nineteenth century. The emerging nationalist
consciousness adopted the heritage of Hindu culture as the focus of its identity and gloried in its Hindu past.59 This is not surprising considering that the nineteenth century India was being simultaneously and actively affected by the forces of the Bengal Renaissance, a cultural movement based upon Western liberal humanism, and the nationalist consciousness that began to take concrete shape after 1850.

An interesting example of translation embedded in the conflicting commitments of its times is R.C. Dutt's translation of the Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata which, according to the translator, are the "national property" of Indians.60 Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848-1909) had a distinguished career as a member of the Indian Civil Service in British India. He published valuable treatises on the economic history of India and emerged as a crucial figure in India's economic nationalism of the late nineteenth century. His Lays of Ancient India included translations of the Rigveda, the Upanishads, Kalidasa and Bhairavi. Dutt's translations of the Indian epics reflect ideological predilections and highlight the reasons why Indians wanted to translate for a Western audience. Dutt was doing to cultural mythology, what Roy did to religion. If Roy foregrounded the monotheistic elements of Hinduism in order to bring it in line with the religion of the dominating -- Christianity, Dutt's translation of the Indian epics centralized the richness and antiquity of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata in order to establish their similarity with the two epics of ancient Greece- the Iliad and the Odyssey. He states, "Ancient India, like ancient Greece, boasts of two great epics. The Mahabharata, based on the legends and traditions of a great historical war, is the Iliad of India. The Ramayana, describing the wanderings and adventures of a prince banished from his country, has so
far something in common with the *Odyssey*. Dutt glorifies the cultural heritage of India and shows how the Hindu epics could be ranked alongside the Iliad and the *Odyssey*. It was a common practice at this time to reclaim a glorious past and to confer dignity upon the present. As Panikker notes: "The intellectual quest in colonial India, engaged in an enquiry into the meaning of the past and thus in an assessment of its relevance to contemporary society, was an outcome of this awareness." The Indian present (by which is meant the nineteenth century) got a severe beating in all British accounts. Many Indians had also come to believe in the theory of the degraded present. It was important for someone like Dutt, operating within the nationalist paradigm, to invest the present with dignity. Dutt does this by establishing a continuity between the past and the present: "It is not an exaggeration to state that two hundred millions of Hindus of the present day cherish in their hearts the story of their ancient Epics." Dutt also, perhaps not so consciously, resists the essentializing definitions of Hindus prevailing among the British. The commonly held view among most English people, whether liberal Romantics like William Jones or Utilitarians like James Mill, was that the Hindus were by nature indolent and given to submission. In outlining his scheme of translating the two epics, Dutt contests this view by referring to the two different sides of the Hindu. "The *Ramanyana* embodies the domestic and religious life of ancient India, with all its tenderness and sweetness, its endurance and devotion. The *Mahabharata* depicts the political life of ancient India, with all its valour and heroism, ambition and lofty chivalry." The epics relate to two sides of the Hindus which complement each other. The impact of Dutt's translations could not have been very pervasive among his Indian readers. M.K.Naik's assessment of the translation is quite unequivocally negative. He
says, "While acknowledging fully Dutt's services in making these two great Hindu epics easily accessible to the Western reader in the popular idiom of late Victorianism, the final verdict on his translations must be the same as that well known assessment of Pope's Homer: 'A pretty poem... but not Homer.' There are only stray and brief references to Dutt's translation. Sujit Mukherjee refers to Dutt's translation briefly to illustrate "new writing" -- "the necessary re-making that takes place whenever an older Indian text is translated into a more Modern language." The introductions and epilogues to both epics very clearly address a non-Indian and especially a Western reader. The comparisons with Greek mythology and more importantly Dutt's employment of the Tennysonian Locksley Hall metre are angled towards the reader to whom Indian culture has to be explained in Western terms. Dutt's translation of the epics must have had a reasonably positive reception in Britain. It was included in the 'Everyman's Library' of the World's Best Books." The cultural implications of such choices and the relationships fashioned through translation, especially in the context of vastly unequal relationships make the translations of colonial India very interesting.

The next translation to be considered is that of Dinabandhu Mitra's Nildurpan. Nildurpan is a trenchant play, a socio-historical document about indigo planters in Bengal and it appeared first in the Bengali original in 1860. Within seven months of its publication, Nildurpan was translated into English and was sent to England. The copies of the English translation were meant for Europeans who had, according to its publisher expressed a desire to read the play in English. When the first English edition was brought out, 500 copies were produced for private circulation, of which 202 went to European readers. Not
more than 14 copies were circulated in India. Eventually the play was translated into various European and Indian languages and several English editions have appeared since. In a famous trial Rev. James Long was sentenced to imprisonment for publishing *Nildurpan* and almost everyone associated with the English translation of the play was penalised. In the first edition of the original version, the author used a pseudonym — 'A Traveller.' However, Dinabandhu Mitra could not keep his identity secret for long. The reasons for his not disclosing his identity are fairly obvious since the content of the play was very controversial. Through the story of a peasant family and the miseries they go undergo at the hands of white indigo planters, the play addresses racial exploitation by the British. The play was viewed as an Indian version of Uncle Tom's Cabin. It is an expression of the anger and indignation at the economic exploitation of Indians by the British. After the 1850s, enthusiasm for British rule was on the wane, a fact manifest in India's first struggle for independence in 1857. The Anglo-Bengali honeymoon had come to an end. Tapan Raychaudhuri reminds us that "the tendency to trace the misfortunes of the rural poor to British arbitrariness and exploitation also go back to this period." Caricatures and satires of English officials became common means of expressing resistance in regional writings of the day. As long as such writings remained in regional languages and the English circle abroad had no access to them through translation, the British government in India did not take the problem seriously. While Dinabandhu Mitra's play existed in Bengali, it did not interfere with the government. The Bengali version was staged not just before, but even after, a libel suit was instituted against its publisher. The English translation, however, unleashed problems and was fateful in some ways. It appeared seven months after the original play and created a sensation both
through its revolutionary content and in the kind of reaction it evoked from the colonial British government. It posed a threat to the government in various ways. The government thought that, if made available to English audience in England the translation would play havoc with public opinion and the play was promptly banned. Das notes that "the government followed a policy which was not draconian so as to muffle all voices of protest and resistance but was watchful enough to muzzle them whenever it felt threatened." It signaled a drastic change in Indo-British relationships and British attitudes towards Vernacular literature and perhaps contributed to some extent towards the making of the Vernacular Act. The identity of the translator of *Nildurpan* remains something of a mystery. The 'invisibility of the translator here is rather literal. All the English editions state, 'Translated by a Native.' According to the Rev. James Long "both the play and translation are native bonafide productions and depict the Indigo Planting System as viewed by the Natives at large." It is widely held that the translator was Michael Madhusudan Dutt, though this has been difficult to establish with certainty.

In a consideration of the trajectory of Indian Literature in English translation, the translation of *Nildurpan* is important, but not for the controversies surrounding it. *Nildurpan* in English represents a paradigm different from previous translations. If most works in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were from the classical tradition of Sanskrit and Persian, *Nildurpan* is one of the very few works to be translated from a *bhasha* (after G.N.Devy). If translating the *Vedas* or *Upanishads* or even a literary text was a subscription to the "great" tradition of Sanskrit, *Nildurpan* was rooted in a more 'desi' (non-Sanskritic and local) tradition and serves as a counterpoint. Unlike most other
translations, Nildurpan engages with a burning issue of the day: the indigo plantation. It is perhaps the first translation to be engaged with the immediate and obviously political and is a change from the glorification of the Indian past in previous translation activity. Finally, the translation of Nildurpan and consequent furore are also a comment upon the censorship and supervision of knowledge transmitted from India to the 'home' country.

The act of translating a controversial text like Nildurpan was subversive. Apart from that, Nildurpan has not had any definitive impact upon the body of translations. In fact, no translation by Indians in the nineteenth century significantly shaped or even inaugurated a serious consideration of Indian Literature in English. Indians in the nineteenth century were translating sporadically and mostly from Sanskrit. There is a handful of works from Indian languages other than Sanskrit that have made their way into English. Among those translated by Englishmen are Bankimchandra's novels and Indulekha by Chandu Menon translated from Malyalam under official patronage. Such works were translated for a microscopic Western community, and were perhaps undertaken to help the British civil servants gain some idea of what was happening in the vernaculars.

At the turn of the century, we find a notable translator translating from various languages -- from Latin, Sanskrit, French, Tamil, Gujarati and Bangla into English. Aurobindo was a prolific translator and had definite views on the translation process. He translated parts of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata; the Bhagavad Geeta and selections of Kalidasa from Sanskrit. From Bengali he translated Bankimchandra's Ananadmath, but was unable to complete it. He also translated the Kural in parts from Tamil. It is difficult to assess the influence of his translations on readers or even to arrive at some sociology of his
readership. Such translation exercises were unorganized and sporadic, neither significant nor voluminous enough. While the volume of translations into English continued to be thin for all of the nineteenth and most of the twentieth century, one singular text, Gitanjali by Tagore in 1912 became a text of great consequence. In its impact upon the West, Gitanjali matches the phenomenon of Jones' Shakuntala.

The next work under discussion is Gitanjali and its legendary poet-translator Rabindranath Tagore. The task of assessing Tagore's translation of Gitanjali is both difficult and repetitive. A substantial component of Tagore scholarship in India and abroad is a study of Tagore's translations and in some cases, re-translations of his poetry. Studies of Tagore's Gitanjali from a purely textual and now post-colonial point of view attest to Tagore's cavalier and accommodating attitude while translating his own poetry. Tagore himself made honest admissions about the injury he had caused to his original works. He received the Nobel Prize for Gitanjali and The Gardener, but "the constant adjustment to suit the poetics of the colonized" brought staggering success along with quiet embarrassment.71 The images of a spiritual and mystical East released by Tagore through Gitanjali and other works created a lop-sided picture of the poet and the culture he represented. Tagore realised this when he said, "When I began this career of falsifying my own coins I did it in play. Now I am becoming frightened of my misdeeds and withdraw into my original vocation as a mere Bengali poet."72 It was too late by then. Tagore's reputation in the West rested upon his English translations and he reaped the fruits in more ways than one. The reasons why Tagore fashioned and re-fashioned his translations to suit a particular style will be discussed later. For the moment, let us
examine the relationship of Gitanjali with other works of translation preceding it. The position of Gitanjali was different from those of the preceding works in several ways. We have noticed that with translations by Indians so far — whether it was Roy translating the Upanishads or Dutt translating the epics — the act of translation was harnessed to the larger goals of revivalism and nationalism. Referring to translations of this period, Kapil Kapoor aptly says that they form part of a "larger process of resistance to the alien domination, an expression of identity, a reassertion of the native self." Gitanjali on the other hand was unmistakably authored and its translation rooted in community efforts to project its author to the outside world. Gitanjali also marked a new and "formalist" phase of translation, since translation itself became the primary motive. One can, according to Devy, "consider 1912 as the beginning of translation in India, for it is since then, following Tagore, that Indian translators turned to translating contemporary Indian works." Finally the publication of Gitanjali was also the beginning of translation as commercial activity. When Macmillan, London, bought the rights of Gitanjali from the India Office, it was with the aim of making it a selling proposition. Several scholars have discussed the escalation of Gitanjali in literary and commercial terms and its subsequent 'fall.' The stress here is upon the historical value of Gitanjali and its contribution to the body of Indian Literature in English.

If Gitanjali was a beginning as far as translations qua translations are concerned, it was really the culmination of efforts begun at least a decade earlier. Long before Tagore's "unnatural decision" to be his own translator, there were sporadic, but well-meaning efforts of personal friends and admirers to translate him. Tagore enjoyed a great
reputation as a Bengali poet and the till the age of 51, he had himself never felt the need
to be a part of the literature of the West. Constant demands for translation of his works
from friends like William Rothenstein (who later on played a seminal role in the
appearance of Gitanjali) and a sense of dissatisfaction with the existing translations made
Tagore undertake the task himself. Das describes the circumstances that led Tagore to
become the most reputed, as well as controversial, bilingual author of our time. Unlike
the Indo-Anglian poets of his time, Tagore never believed in using anything other than
the mother tongue for creative purposes. But a realization that "An Indian writer, that is a
writer who writes in an Indian language either by choice or by accident, is fated to be
unknown to the rest of the world irrespective of his literary accomplishments, unless he is
translated into a 'major' language" must have begun to dawn on Tagore. However,
Tagore's own account of the genesis of Gitanjali is far from consistent. In a letter to his
niece, he relates how after a long illness, he wanted to take up some 'light work' and so
took up translation of his poems. He admits though, "I did not undertake this task in a
spirit of reckless bravery, I simply felt an urge to recapture, through the medium of
another language, the feelings and sentiments which had created such a feast of joy
within me in past days." The letter was written when Tagore was on his way to
England, a journey not merely physical. On another occasion, Tagore expresses his
inability to use the English language, "That I cannot write in English is such a patent fact
that I never even had the vanity to feel ashamed of it. If anybody wrote an English note
asking me to tea, I did not feel equal answering it. Perhaps you think by now I have got
over that delusion, but in no way am I deluded that I have composed in English." Such
contradictions blur the intentions governing Tagore's decision to translate himself when
he was already the most reputed Bengali poet of his time. To come back to Tagore's Gitanjali or Song offerings (a selection of devotional works from three collections), it was read out before the most elite literary circle made possible with the help of Rothenstein. Gitanjali was submitted for publication to The India Office first with W.B. Yeats' famous introduction.

The response was overwhelming. The initial enthusiasm for Gitanjali can be 'explained' in several ways. The book appeared before literary circles at a time when Europe was passing through a very turbulent period, preceding the First World War. It also coincided with Tagore's interaction with the West through lectures and talks on religion. This firmly placed the poet-translator as a kind of mystic who had the key to dealing with turmoil and unhappiness. Eminent poets like W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound and Ernest Rhys welcomed Gitanjali as "the vision of India from which we are to get a fresher sense of nature and life." According to Ezra Pound, the 'message' of Gitanjali restored "saner stillness" in the midst of the "clangour of mechanisms." Yeats' introduction to Gitanjali is too well-known to be quoted here. The point is, Tagore personified to the West not only his poetry and his message, but also India. The binary dichotomous view that India had spirituality while the West had rationalism was reinforced by the image of Tagore. Tagore was not unaware of the reasons behind the appeal of Gitanjali. His tended to lean towards a 'simple' and 'lyrical' kind of poetry when he had to translate into English. Gitanjali began to exist in transcendental space, where it had no connection with other sides of Tagore's poetic and political career. The Tagore of the West was Tagore in translation to the extent that it is said aptly, "There are (at least) two Rabindranath Tagores. One is the most
consequential Bengali writer of the century, the author of poems, plays, short stories, songs, memoirs and essays of enduring popularity and importance; the other was a literary sensation in England, America, and Europe in the wake of the publication of Gitanjali, a collection of short poems given florid prose translation, in 1912. These two figures have alarmingly little in common, and it is tempting to identify the former as the real Tagore, and the latter as the product of a collectively overheated orientalist imagination..."82

What was the impact of the English translation on the Indian subcontinent? The English translation of Gitanjali drew an Indian translator's attention to the possibilities of translating into English. The ambition of all Indian writers and translators was undoubtedly fired by the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913.83 Soon after Gitanjali, Tagore's works were translated extensively into most Indian languages. To give an example, Gujarati registers at least thirty-five different translations of Tagore's works. The well-known Gujarati fiction writer Dhoomketu translated Gitanjali into Gujarati in 1956. This translation ran into three editions and four reprints. The diffusion of Tagore's works notwithstanding, it would be overstating the case to attribute this to the English Gitanjali, because the translations were made directly from Bengali and there was no mediation through English. Translation in India, among Indian languages, at the beginning of the twentieth century, could not have depended on an English translation of an Indian work. It is difficult to agree with Das's remark that "the most important role that English played is, undoubtedly, through translation. It is only through a translated text, Gitanjali, that Indian literature received international attention and the inter-literary
communication within India became easy and quick.84 Bengali had been a 'donor' language since the eighteenth century and Indian languages had constantly borrowed and translated from Bengali long before Gitanjali appeared on the scene. Indian audiences outside Bengal accessed had had access to and appreciated the works of Saratchandra and Bankimchandra without the mediation of English. In that sense, the claim attached to the impact of the English translation of Gitanjali on the Indian literary scene is somewhat unfounded. There is little doubt, however, of the foundational importance of Gitanjali in any systematic consideration of Indian texts in English. While making a plea for a separate recognition of Indo-English literature (as opposed to Indo-Anglian), Gokak remarks that one befitting way to honouring the message and significance of Gitanjali would be to create a body of Indo-English writing, which will wear Gitanjali as a jewel in its crown.85

III

The impact of Gitanjali notwithstanding, translations from Indian languages into English remained an uninstitutionalized, sporadic activity till well into the middle of the twentieth century. The institutionalization of translation took place in independent India in 1947. As a sovereign nation-state, India felt the need to invent, foreground and bestow common symbols upon a conglomerate of states and languages. The State perceived the need to establish common links among different linguistic communities and create literary awareness of all literatures. This impulse governed the establishment of two institutions, the Sahitya Akademi (1954), and the National Book Trust (1957). In the light of the
objective of nation-building, translation of 'reputed' and 'representative' literary works from one Indian language into another was important. The National Book Trust (NBT) undertook to fulfill this goal through its scheme of Aadan-Pradan (meaning give and take). It has been undertaking translations from Indian languages into Indian languages and, very recently, English has also been incorporated into this scheme. (More details on the role of these two institutions will follow in the next chapter) For the first two decades after independence, there were hardly any institutions engaged in private English translation. The place of the English language seemed rather uncertain. However the Constitution made allowances for English. An official policy that made English a permanent and powerful part of India was formulated in 1958. Publishing activities in English by Indians received encouragement after the 1960s. In the sixties, some private publishers (Jaico, Asia and Vikas) had begun to publish titles in English translation. At the same time also, UNESCO's Collection of Representative Works chose Indian works for translation into other languages of the world, including English. This provided some impetus to translations of modern Indian works into English. In addition to this, P.Lal, the Indo-Anglian poet and translator founded the Writers' Workshop in 1958. This one-man publishing house published literature written and 'transcreated' (a term coined by P.Lal for readable and not strictly faithful translations) into English, providing a forum to many poets and translators at that time. Incidentally, the Writers' Workshop also brought out an anthology of Modern Indo-Anglian Poetry (1958). This anthology inaugurated Modernist (influenced by Anglo-American Modernism) poetry in English written by Indian poets. The language and sensibility of this 'new' poetry was ironic, unsentimental and terse. The idiom made available by poets such as Nissim Ezekiel, Lal and Ramanujan came to be
used for poetry originally in English as well as poetry translated into English. Out of this group of poets writing in the sixties and seventies, emerged A. K. Ramanujan.

The emergence and success of Ramanujan as a master-translator whose translations have become almost canonical, marks an important juncture. Before we go into a detailed examination of Ramanujan, let us look at the ways in which his translations depart from the earlier ones. It was mentioned earlier that translations in the nineteenth century were part of a larger movement for social reform and spiritual regeneration. The emphasis upon translation as a 'literary' or 'academic' exercise was missing. This is not to say that the 'purely literary' exercises are not part of larger cultural and political practices. The point is whether translation proper formed the primary aim of exercises before the twentieth century. By and large, that was not the case. *Gitanjali* was the first translation undertaken for its own sake, because its poet-translator wanted to see his poetry take on English dress. However, *Gitanjali* was not the best illustration of 'accurate' translation. For lack of means or by choice, a competent and professional attitude towards translating literary texts was not established till the middle of the twentieth century. The difficulties involved in expressing indigenous realities faithfully and well in an alien, target language crippled projects of translations from Indian languages into English. Most translations even in the first half of the twentieth century, efforts by well meaning individuals or by institutions such as the Sahitya Akademi, suffer from this. What was required was a combination of inwardness with both the source and the target language combined with literary skills. In 1976 Sujit Mukherjee suggested that Indo-Anglian writers themselves are by definition the best prospective translators, but not many of them have so far
undertaken this onerous job. He also hoped that the "brilliant example" set by Ramanujan would encourage others. When Ramanujan's translations appeared, it seemed possible to overcome linguistic barriers and translate with elegance. In this sense, Ramanujan's translations, beginning with *Interior Landscape* (1967) through *Speaking of Siva* and *Samskara* in the seventies and ending with *Poems of Love and War* (1985), mark a qualitative change. Ramanujan is therefore the next translator under consideration. A range of contexts and situations contributed to the making of Ramanujan as a translator, his choice of texts and the reception of his translations. After the 1960s Ramanujan became one of the most influential post-Orientalist and anti-colonial voices in South Asian and comparative inter-disciplinary studies: he opposed the historically and culturally homogenising "Sanskritist" vision of India that was still hegemonic among European and Anglo-American area-specialists in the Cold War decades, and emphasised the immense linguistic, regional, and diachronic diversity of the subcontinent's cultures.

Ramanujan was operating from the context of anthropology and linguistics, where the awareness of what constitutes high and low, great and little traditions is quite sharp. His forays into disciplines such as linguistics, anthropology and ethnography and his own standing as a Modernist poet in English form a backdrop. As a linguist, Ramanujan was interested in the non-classical, desi languages, as opposed to classical languages such as Persian and Sanskrit. He called the former "kitchen-languages/mother-tongues" and the latter "market- languages/father-tongues." According to Ramanujan, cultural memories and truths lay in the kitchen-languages rather than the more dominating father-tongues. This view was in tandem with Milton Singer's well-known division of "great" and "little" traditions. Classical traditions exist and continue, very often, at the cost of smaller
homegrown traditions. (Incidentally, Ramanujan was teaching in Chicago, the breeding ground of Singer's ideas) All this led Ramanujan to believe that Sanskrit had been over-emphasised in India, while other Indian languages, especially ancient Tamil and Kannada, had been marginalised. "Through his translations from Tamil and Kannada into English, Ramanujan was trying to restore this balance," suggests Harish Trivedi.

This formed the political-cultural agenda underlying Ramanujan's translations like Speaking of Siva. The vacanas of the Virasaiva poets lent themselves to modernist, terse treatment in the hands of Ramanujan. His use of a contemporary, ironic English mode seemed 'natural' enough for many to think that his translations read like originals. It was this quality along with the radical content that facilitated a positive reception of Ramanujan's translations in the West. And yet to say, as one critic does that "Ramanujan's translations definitely unfurl the banner of Dravidian culture and literature and keep it flying aloft for the entire English-speaking world to watch and admire it with an open heart," would be an overstatement and oversimplification. Ramanujan's views on translation came to be considered as standard and canonical. His use of a terse, elliptic English became the model for the modern translation idiom. Trivedi notes that he was inspirational, his was the kind of success that many people wanted to emulate.

On the other hand, there have been serious objections to Ramanujan's style of translation from some quarters. Recent theories in criticism demand 'resistive' kinds of translating, rather than fully assimilative ways through which the source text becomes a part of the target culture. A postcolonialist view favours disruptive practices that point to slippages and ruptures in translation rather than a smooth, lucid rendering. Tejaswini Niranjana
points out this problem in Ramanujan's translations of the *vacanas* in *Speaking of Siva*. According to another critic, Ramanujan 'fails' to be truly postcolonial, because his translations, "aim at a synthesis not a creative encounter". Such debates in translation theory and practice may have modified the reception of Ramanujan's translations today, but his emergence can still be treated as a landmark. Trivedi makes a final, apt evaluation of Ramanujan: "Ramanujan was doing a one-man job. He had ploughed his own furrow. There were not too many doing it the same way. He had his own political agenda and then he was positioned in the West. He was not a part of any movement in India, but he was definitely a precursor."

The period from Ramanujan's well-known translations such as *Samskara* and *Speaking of Siva* to the present asks for a different mode in historiography. So far, we have traced the trajectory of translation from Indian literature into English in terms of its genesis and landmarks. The next stage of literary translation is the stage of its formation as a full-fledged commercial industry and academic discipline. The industry of translation into English ground on sporadically and slowly well into the mid-eighties. The intervening period was punctuated by some translations undertaken by individuals here and there. Some of Ramanujan's contemporaries had parallel careers in English and regional contexts. For instance, Indian English poets such as Arun Kolatkar and Dilip Chitre translated from Marathi, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra from Hindi, Jayanta Mahapatra from Oriya and R. Parthasarthy from Tamil into English. At roughly the same time, that is in the seventies, a second group of translators emerged -- writers who wrote in their mother tongues but translated from Indian languages into English. This group includes Jyotirmoy...
Datta, Vinda Karandikar, Kishori Charan Das and K. Ayyappa Paniker. According to Dharwadker, these developments of the seventies were expressive and constitutive of a "complex continuum between English and the various Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages." All this did not add significantly to the number of translations nor did it create a sustained market for literary translation. In the late seventies, Prabhakar Machwe stated that, "Even after 25 years, we have not been able to develop a team of ten good, competent translators of literature from Indian languages into English." Since the late eighties, there have been dramatic changes in the production, reception and respectability of literary translations into English. There is a steady flow of carefully produced translated texts that are read, discussed and absorbed into new canons of literature. There has been a great increase in the number of people translating and texts being translated. The reservations about whether or not indigenous modes can be translated into English have worn off. That the translation industry is far more visible and prolific than ever before is also supported by energetic debates about translations. The quantum leaps in the quantity and confidence of translation into English today have formed an important historical juncture in the sociology of this field. While the legacies of the past outlined so far continue to play their own roles, the expansion and consolidation of literary translation in recent times is an outcome of specific determinants of the eighties and nineties. The next chapter is an investigation of these determinants with a view to historicising the present stage of translation into English.
NOTES


5 I owe special thanks to Harish Trivedi for offering some insights into this period. The comments that appear in the course of this chapter are from a personal interview, 15 February, 1998.


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